

Tape 28

Side A, 4 1/2 - 4 9/16

7 JUL 1980

NOTE FOR: Gary

FROM: DCI

I'd like to talk to you about retrieving some material from the  
Reflections Folders.

*Xerox to Gary*

# American policy: Aid Khmers, but don't rile Thais

By Rod Nordland  
Inquirer Staff Writer

BANGKOK — U.S. policy here has been to support Thailand and the other non-communist Southeast Asian countries in their efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Cambodian problem.

Most officials would agree with a remark made by Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) shortly after she visited Phnom Penh last November. "The ultimate solution to the Cambodian problem? I think it will have to be a political solution — if there are any people left by then," she said.

The U.S. refugee coordinator, Victor Palmieri, has urged that cross-border feeding operations and other relief programs be continued. And the United States has pledged to underwrite one-third of the costs of the total relief efforts on the part of the international community.

But Palmieri and other officials have quietly assented to the policy of not resettling Cambodian refugees in third countries — except for those with immediate family abroad. And U.S. officials have never sought an increase in refugee quotas to provide for the resettlement of Cambodians.

The U.S. Refugee Office in the U.S. embassy here has, however, set up a Khmer Emergency Group, which has monitored the circumstances of Cambodian refugees and often lobbied for better treatment of the refugees by the Thais.

And the embassy, along with international agencies, has quietly brought considerable pressure to bear on the Thai government to shelter Cambodians and not repatriate them. Thailand is a firm U.S. ally and the recipient of large foreign aid grants and military arms.

U.S. refugee officials have pushed to have Cambodian refugees considered as candidates for resettlement within the existing U.S. quotas of 14,000 refugees a month. But Thailand and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have

refused to cooperate unless the quotas are increased. They argue that other refugee groups already in Thailand must be resettled first.

U.S. officials regard the Cambodian refugee issue as an impasse that will not be broken until there is some sort of diplomatic settlement of the issue of the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.

Vietnamese troops invaded in December 1978 and now occupy the country. The rationale given for the invasion was that the Chinese-backed regime of Pol Pot had threatened Vietnam's security, and that Vietnam had come into the country at the invitation of the government of Heng Samrin, who is generally regarded as a client ruler for Hanoi.

On Nov. 14, the United Nations, in a resounding defeat for Vietnam, declared the occupation unwarranted and called for Vietnam's withdrawal.

The United Nations continues to recognize the Pol Pot regime as Cambodia's legitimate government, although most member nations deplored the atrocities committed by that government during its four years of rule, from 1975 to early 1979.

The Khmer Rouge has retained the Cambodian seat in the United Nations, and the United States, Thailand and the other ASEAN (Southeast Asian non-communist) nations continue to recognize that government.

The ASEAN position, supported by the United States, is that the Hanoi government should withdraw its troops and the United Nations should sponsor free elections with the aim of establishing a neutral Cambodia. Presumably, under such a settlement, a large proportion of the refugees would be willing to return to their homeland.

But Hanoi has declared the situation in Cambodia "irreversible," refusing to withdraw its troops as long as it believes that China represents a threat to it. China has been supplying arms to the Pol Pot guerrillas.

But Hanoi has not shown itself unwilling to negotiate the issue, and in recent weeks there has been a flurry of diplomatic visits by top Vietnamese officials to Bangkok and other Thai cities, including Thailand.

U.S. intelligence sources say the occupation of Cambodia, and the continued guerrilla warfare with the Khmer Rouge, are costing Vietnam's sponsor, the Soviet Union, \$2 million a day in military aid.

And Vietnam has plenty of its own problems, with post-war reconstruction and a food shortage as the result of several years of poor crops, that might incline it toward a solution.

Pending any kind of diplomatic breakthrough, U.S. policy on the Cambodian refugees has centered on assuring Thailand that it will maintain its commitment to take the early Vietnamese and Laotian refugees, and to continue a high level of financial support.

Arguing before Congress against any cutbacks in U.S. quotas, Palmieri, the U.S. coordinator for refugees, warned that Thailand — as well as other countries in the region — "would view a cutback as a breach of our repeated assurances of support, and they might feel that there is no recourse but to refuse asylum to new arrivals, as they did last spring.

"Lessening of international and particularly United States support could have an adverse effect on the on-going debate in Thailand on the official refugee policy. And it might also have a negative impact on the Thai government's response to any new influx of Khmer," Palmieri said.

Given those immediate concerns, U.S. officials have made no initiatives — at least publicly — toward arranging for resettlement of refugees from Cambodia.

The current refugee intake stands at a total of 231,700 refugees for fiscal year 1980, and the Carter administration has proposed keeping the figure at that level for next year. This total includes 168,000 Indochinese refugees, or 14,000 per month, and the administration has sought to keep that proportion constant for 1981 as well.

The balance of the U.S. refugee intake will be made up of refugees largely from communist countries, with 19,500 from Cuba and 38,000 from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

U.S. officials say it would be unrealistic to expect an increase in those totals to provide for resettlement of Cambodians in the United States, and U.S. officials say that policy.